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File Code: 3420

Date: October 5, 2005

Route To:

Subject: Potential FY 2006 Insect and Disease Prevention/Suppression Projects, Cuba, Coyote, and Jemez Districts

To: Forest Supervisor, Santa Fe National Forest

In August, Dave Conklin of our staff met with Andy Vigil (SFNF westside silviculturist) to examine potential FY 2006 insect and disease prevention/suppression project areas on the Cuba, Coyote, and Jemez Districts. This letter summarizes stand conditions and potential treatments in these areas, and includes our recommendations.

Chaparral Units, Cuba RD. Five units (#1-5, from south to north) in this WUI project area, located south of the Rancho del Chaparral Girl Scout Camp, were examined by walkthroughs. Two similar units in this area were included in an FY 2005 bark beetle prevention project (see our 3420 letter of October 13, 2004).

Units 1 (15 acres) and 2 (29 acres) are both predominantly ponderosa pine poles and small sawtimber, with occasional to significant amounts of Douglas-fir and white fir. These are productive stands (estimated site indices of 80 to 90), with little or no dwarf mistletoe infection. Both units have been thinned previously (around 30 years ago and again about 10 years ago) and have current densities of 250 to 400 trees/acre and basal areas of 120 to 150 ft².

Unit 3 (52 acres) is a more variable stand (due to the varied terrain), with scattered pockets of pine dwarf mistletoe infection. The upper end of the unit is primarily mixed-conifer. Portions of this unit have never been thinned; here densities probably exceed 1000 trees/acre. Within the previously thinned portions, densities are similar to those in Units 1 and 2. Site indices range from about 70 to 80.

Pine bark beetles have caused significant amounts of mortality in each of these units over the past three to five years. Tree mortality, old thinning slash, and large accumulations of duff contribute to high fuel-loading. Additional observations of note in these stands include the high incidence of fir broom rust (*Melampsorella*) and a stem deformity (probably genetic) affecting a small but significant proportion of the pine.

Units 4 (66 acres) and 5 (30 acres) are generally less productive pine stands, occurring on rockier sites with shallow soils. These areas have a high incidence of dwarf mistletoe; the disease is especially severe in Unit 4, where virtually every tree appeared to be infected.

We recommend that Units 4 and 5 be deferred from thinning because of their low productivity and scarcity of good "leave trees;" perhaps these stands could be managed with prescribed fire. Units 1, 2, and 3 could all benefit from thinning; Andy plans to include these areas in an FY 2006 proposal. To improve stand vigor and reduce bark beetle susceptibility, basal areas should be reduced to around 60 to 80 ft². Ideally, treatment of these units would include removal of



some commercial-size material. For addressing dwarf mistletoe in Unit 3, we recommend cutting all infected trees less than 5" dbh and retaining lightly infected trees greater than 5" dbh where they are the best available trees. Prescribed burning should also be considered for these areas to reduce long-term accumulation of fuel.

Mesa Poleo, Coyote RD. We examined a potential project area roughly 200 acres in size, located directly south of the FY 2005 project area (see our 3420 letter of October 20, 2004) and north of an area that was being thinned (by force account) at the time of our visit. These stands are part of a designated WUI adjacent to the community of Mesa Poleo, where the District is working to reduce fire hazard, improve overall forest conditions, and provide small wood products.

The area examined is a mature, uneven-aged ponderosa pine stand last thinned in the late 1970s. Site quality is moderate (estimated site index of 70 to 75); overall, this area appeared to be somewhat more productive and denser than the 2005 project area. Very little dwarf mistletoe infection was observed. Basal areas typically range from 100 to 150 ft²; overstocked groups of poles and saplings occur intermittently throughout.

The planned prescription for this area would thin trees to an average 20-foot spacing, favoring the better dominant and codominant trees. Somewhat closer spacing is recommended within sapling groups in order to retain more of these young trees. Thinning of this area would remove some commercial products (up to 16" dbh) and provide fuelwood for the local communities. This project should clearly improve stand growth and vigor, reducing susceptibility to bark beetle attack.

Los Griegos, Jemez RD. An evaluation covering a 120 acre portion of this WUI near the community of Sierra los Pinos was completed last year (see our 3420 letter of October 20, 2004). Funding was not available for treatment of this area (Los Griegos 2) in FY 2005; Andy plans to resubmit the proposal for FY 2006. This new proposal may include an additional 20 to 30 acres adjacent to the original unit, which would essentially complete the western portion of the WUI. Stand conditions in this additional area—dense mixed-conifer interspersed with small openings—are similar to those in the original 120 acre unit.

Please contact Dave Conklin if you have questions about this evaluation or need assistance completing projects proposals for these areas.

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